



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Ben Sherman, NOAA Public Affairs
(301) 713-3066 ext. 178

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 16, 2007

NOAA LAUNCHES GULF OF MEXICO MARINE DEBRIS MAPPING WEB SITE; SURVEYING EFFORTS CONTINUE IN ALABAMA, MISSISSIPPI, LOUISIANA

In a continuing effort to improve maritime safety and commerce in the northern Gulf of Mexico, NOAA recently launched its Gulf of Mexico Marine Debris Project Web site, an outlet for hydrographic survey data identifying risks posed by debris left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Submerged marine debris is a threat to viable commercial fishing and shrimping activities in the northern Gulf of Mexico coastal zone.

The Web site (<http://gulfofmexico.marinedebris.noaa.gov>) provides users with critical information and maps of near shore survey areas, indicating the geographic position of each debris location identified in Gulf Coastal waters by the current NOAA survey team. The NOAA team is also developing an Internet Mapping System (IMS) to deliver debris location and raw data to users via dynamic, scaleable, and easy to use web-based maps. Both printable maps and the IMS interface highlight areas of debris abundance as potential threats to commercial fishing and shrimping operations. This information is also being used in ongoing debris removal efforts coordinated by local resource managers, the United States Coast Guard, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. As debris is located and contact locations confirmed, NOAA will work to promptly update online maps and nautical charts.

“The launch of this Web site is a huge step forward in helping to revive areas identified as critical near-shore fishing grounds,” said Holly A. Bamford, director of the NOAA Marine Debris Program, “and it also supports the much needed improvement to navigational safety.”

As a result of the 2005 hurricane season, the coastal zones of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama were littered with debris presenting hazards to safe navigation, commercial fishing, recreational boating, and other normal coastal uses. The major sources of debris include materials that may have washed from the impacted coastal areas as a result of storm surge and retreating flood-waters. Wrecked and lost recreational and commercial vessels have also contributed to the marine debris hazard. Some of the debris also originated from the numerous offshore oil and gas facilities that were destroyed or heavily damaged by the hurricane force winds and heavy storm surge.

NOAA has been surveying coastal Gulf waters from Alabama to Louisiana since last fall and in January started operations in Lake Bourgne, Louisiana. Surveying work continues in Mississippi, along the coast, and in bay areas of Alabama. Using both sidescan and single beam acoustic sonar, survey teams have located and listed thousands of hazards and marine debris that were deposited through storm-surge, retreating flood waters and the storm itself.

As part of the survey efforts NOAA is demonstrating use of new technology and survey platforms. An Autonomous Survey Vessel has been deployed successfully in hazard surveys in Mobile Bay. The vessel employs both sidescan and single beam sonar with Global Positioning System (GPS) and is one of the first unmanned vehicles used by NOAA for this type of work.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the

Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

-- 30 --

On the Web:

NOAA: www.noaa.gov

NOAA National Ocean Service: www.nos.noaa.gov

Office of Coast Survey: <http://nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/>

Office of Response and Restoration: <http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/index.php>

Gulf of Mexico Marine Debris Project: <http://gulfofmexico.marinedebris.noaa.gov>

Marine Debris Program: <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/welcome.html>